

#### **4VAC15-240-10. Game: Turkey: Fall Season; generally.**

##### **Summary:**

The proposal is to i) open the fall season one week earlier, ii) add the Wednesday before Thanksgiving to the fall season, and iii) expand the fall season in five counties on the Northern Neck.

##### **Proposed language of amendment:**

#### **4 VAC 15-240-10. Game: Turkey: Open Season; Generally.**

Except as otherwise specifically provided in the sections appearing in this chapter, it shall be lawful to hunt turkeys ~~from 14 days immediately before~~ the Saturday prior to the ~~last~~ first Monday in ~~October~~ November ~~and for 13 days following~~; on Thanksgiving Day and the day before; on the Monday nearest December 2 through the last Saturday in December, both dates inclusive; and on the second Saturday in January and for 14 days following.

##### **Rationale:**

Opening the fall season one week earlier is proposed to address turkey hunter preferences and Law Enforcement concerns. Currently, the second week of the early season overlaps the early deer muzzleloader season. Via the hunter survey, turkey hunters have expressed a preference to separate the early portion of the fall turkey season from the deer muzzleloader season due to safety concerns; they typically hunt with camouflage and mimic turkey calls. Currently, many turkey hunters who use dogs choose to miss a key week of the season due to concerns about their dogs' safety. Separating the seasons may increase effort/interest in fall hunting by traditional turkey hunters, which has been declining. Law Enforcement officers in southwestern Virginia recommend the separation of the fall turkey season and the early deer muzzleloader season to reduce the opportunity for illegally taking deer with a rifle (which are legal to carry while turkey hunting) and reporting them as muzzleloader harvests.

To amend the loss of opportunistic fall turkey hunting by separating the early fall turkey and early deer muzzleloader season, staff proposes adding another day of fall hunting immediately before Thanksgiving. The Wild Turkey Management Plan directs the Department to maintain opportunities for deer hunters to take turkeys. The Department continues to receive requests for more turkey hunting around Thanksgiving Day.

Finally, this proposal will add four weeks of fall hunting in five counties on the Northern Neck with very high turkey densities. They include King George, Westmoreland, Richmond, Northumberland, and Lancaster counties. The Department has received many requests for a longer season in these counties and turkey populations can withstand greater harvests. In a separate proposal (i.e., 4 VAC 15-240-31), these counties will be removed from their current four-week season; therefore, they will fall under this eight-week general fall season, by default. The eight-week format will add two weeks of hunting in December and two weeks in January.